

# UNH Reports From the Field: In Cairo on Election Day

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Thursday, May 31, 2012

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**NATE PETROCINE ON HOTEL ROOF, LOOKING TOWARD SOUTH WESTERN CAIRO.**

*Nate Petrocine, a senior political science major from Waterville Valley who is studying international affairs, was in Cairo on Election Day, May 23, 2012. Here is his report from the field.*



EGYPTIAN MILITARY FORCES GUARDING INTERIOR MINISTRY, AS SEEN FROM MY HOTEL.



EGYPTIAN WOMEN LINING UP TO CAST VOTES AT 8 P.M. THE MEN ARE LINED UP IN THE BACKGROUND.

Sitting on the roof of my hotel, helicopters roar out along the cityscape. Beige armored vehicles rumble slowly down the streets. Military personnel riding in olive drab jeeps, zigzag in and out of traffic. Giant green trucks outfitted with mesh windows are parked on street corners. Their occupants all dressed in black armor, menacingly wielding batons. I did not have the misfortune to stumble into



**EGYPTIANS IN A POLLING CENTER REVIEWING RESULTS.**

some warzone or armed conflict. Quite the opposite, it's Election Day. The first free elections in Egypt are beginning just outside my 12-story hotel in Cairo.

This is the end of the beginning of a 15-month revolution that deposed Hosni Mubarak, the former president of Egypt, who up until Feb. 11, 2011, had held the Egyptian presidency since 1981. Now Egyptians line up at voting centers early in the morning and later in the evening, to avoid the heat, waiting to cast their ballot. Soldiers armed with machine guns, and police officers dressed in brilliant white uniforms guard the entrances of the polling centers, laughing and joking with one another.

Down the street at the Interior Ministry, riot police have cordoned off a block anticipating confrontation. Tired and bored, they sit on their black helmets and lean their shields up against the barriers, their batons resting on the hot asphalt. As the sun sets over the Nile, old men relax at small alleyway cafes lining the streets to smoke Argileh, their fingers stained yellow from years of tobacco use and now a deep purple signifying they have cast their vote. It's a calm, humid Thursday evening.

To whom the presidency goes we have yet to know. Runoff elections will occur into June. It is a mix between Islamists, secularists and former members of the Mubarak regime. Whoever the candidate, the streets remain as peaceful as a street in Cairo can remain. There are no protests, there are no rioters, and there are no Molotov cocktails. It is a typical evening in the capital on a not so typical day in Egyptian history. And this may be the most important aspect of the election, one that we may very well overlook.

Egyptians are demonstrating they have the capacity to responsibly handle democratic transition seamlessly. On this Thursday evening nothing was out of the ordinary, save for the hundreds of Egyptians lining up at polling centers, waiting to cast their vote. They have taken the electoral process in stride with their everyday lives. That's what is most inspiring. Egyptians who suffered more than 30 years of autocratic rule and 15 months of anticipation are quick to embrace democratic reform and have accepted the tremendous responsibility of choosing their first freely elected leader.

Later that night, I hear what sounds like explosions coming from Tahrir Square, located about a block from my hotel. I run to the roof expecting to see rioters in the streets

battling armor laden police and security forces. Another explosion and a burst of colorful sparks shower over the square as I peak over the wall of my roof. Boys are laughing and jumping around lighting off fireworks that blast color into the hazy night sky.

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